

CCC loans; increase the amount of storage covered by an existing storage agreement for storage of such commodities; or renew an existing agreement for the storage of such commodities.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** April 1, 1999.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Howard Froehlich, Chief, Storage Contract Branch, Warehouse and Inventory Division, Farm Service Agency, United States Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW STOP 0553, Washington, DC 20250-0553, telephone (202) 720-7398, FAX (202) 690-3123.

**Determination:** In accordance with the provisions of the Commodity Credit Corporation Charter Act (15 U.S.C. 714 *et seq.*), CCC enters into storage agreements with grain and rice warehouse operators to provide for the storage of commodities owned by CCC or pledged as security to CCC for marketing assistance loans.

Specifically, 7 CFR part 1421.5558 provides that all grain and rice warehouse operators who do not have an existing agreement with CCC for storage and handling of CCC-owned commodities or commodities pledged to CCC as loan collateral, but who desire such an agreement, must pay an application and examination fee for each warehouse for which CCC approval is sought prior to CCC conducting the original warehouse examination.

A review of the revenue collected for application and examination fees indicates that the fees collected are insufficient to meet costs incurred by CCC for warehouse examinations and contract origination administrative functions. Accordingly, beginning April 1 with the start of the 1999-2000 contract year, the fees are changed by increasing by 7.5 percent those fees applicable to the 1998-99 contract year.

The fee will be computed at the rate of \$16 for each 10,000 bushels of storage capacity or fraction thereof, but the fee will be not less than \$160 nor more than \$1,600.

Further each warehouse operator who has a non-federally licensed grain or rice warehouse in States that do not have a cooperative agreement with CCC for warehouse examinations must additionally pay an annual fee to CCC for each such warehouse which is approved by CCC or for which CCC approval is sought. The collection of the additional fee by CCC is currently suspended. CCC continues to suspend collection of the annual fee, but CCC may reinstate the annual fee by future notice to the industry.

Signed at Washington, DC, on May 5, 1999.

**Keith Kelly,**

*Executive Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation.*

[FR Doc. 99-11993 Filed 5-11-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-05-P

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Rural Business-Cooperative Service

#### Notice of Request for Approval of New Information With Use of a Survey

**AGENCY:** Rural Business-Cooperative Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Proposed collection; comments requested.

**SUMMARY:** In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice announces the Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS) has received approval for a new information collection in order to render service to associations of producers of agricultural, forestry, and fisheries products and federations and subsidiaries thereof as authorized in the Cooperative Marketing Act of 1926.

**DATES:** Comments on this notice must be received by July 12, 1999 to be assured of consideration.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Julie A. Hogeland, Agricultural Economist, RBS, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Stop 3253, Washington, DC. 20250-3253, Telephone (202) 690-0409.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

**Title:** Local Cooperatives' Role in the Emerging Grain and Feed Industry.

**OMB Control Number:** 0570-0032.

**Expiration Date of Approval:** September 30, 1999.

**Type of Request:** New Information Collection.

**Abstract:** The mission of the Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS), formerly Agricultural Cooperative Service (ACS), is to assist farmer-owned cooperatives in improving the economic well-being of their farmer-members. This is accomplished through a comprehensive program of research on structural, operational, and policy issues affecting cooperatives; technical advisory assistance to individual cooperatives and to groups of producers who wish to organize cooperatives; and development of educational and informational material. The authority to carry out RBS's mission is defined in the Cooperative Marketing Act of 1926 (44 Stat. 802-1926).

#### Authority and Duties of Division (7 U.S.C. 453)

(a) The division shall render service to associations of producers of agricultural products, and federations and subsidiaries thereof, engaged in the cooperative marketing of agricultural products including processing, warehousing, manufacturing, storage, the cooperative purchasing of farm supplies, credit, financing, insurance, and other cooperative activities.

(b) The division is authorized to:

(1) Acquire, analyze and disseminate economic, statistical, and historical information regarding the progress, organization, and business methods of cooperative associations in the United States and foreign countries.

(2) Conduct studies of the economic, legal, financial, social and other phases of cooperation, and publish the results thereof. Such studies shall include the analyses of the organization, operation, financial and merchandising problems of cooperative organizations.

(3) Make surveys and analyses if deemed advisable of the accounts and business practices of representative cooperative associations upon their request; to report to the association surveyed the results thereof; and, with the consent of the association surveyed, to publish summaries of the results of such surveys, together with similar facts, for the guidance of cooperative associations and for the purpose of assisting cooperative associations in developing methods of business and market analysis.

(4) Acquire from all available sources, information concerning crop prospects, supply, demand, current receipts, exports, imports, and prices of agricultural products handled or marketed by cooperative associations, and to employ qualified commodity marketing specialists to summarize and analyze this information and disseminate the same among cooperative associations and others.

RBS also has a stated objective to monitor the structure, conduct, and performance of the grains and oilseeds marketing systems and the role and effectiveness of cooperatives within that system; analyze the impact of government programs and policies that affect grains and oilseeds cooperatives; and provide leadership and guidance to grain and oilseed cooperatives based on the results of research and technical assistance studies and on program experience.

The elimination of government storage programs during the mid-1990s removed what, for many years, was the financial backbone of most cooperative

grain elevators. At the same time, the market began a crucial transformation to more fully account for differences in the value of grain in its end use.

Export markets, the genesis of this transformation, typically blend grain lots to achieve a minimum average No. 2 quality. They usually do not pay premiums for No. 1 grain, and they discount from the No. 2 standard. The industry argues that economic gains from blending allow it to operate on a narrower per bushel price margin. This emphasis on price downplays the functional attributes that affect nutrient content or processing characteristics. Moreover, kernel characteristics which increase the harvestability and storability of grain are the opposite of those that improve the efficiency of processing operations. Although processors want softer-textured, thin pericarp kernels, plant breeders have generally focused on harder-textured products.

Consequently, softer grains must be produced on a systematic and contractual basis since such varieties deteriorate when passing through the traditional commodity distribution system. These newer, often genetically-engineered grains are typically produced and marketed outside today's commodity system and purchased as "manufactured" or identity-preserved products.

Cooperatives' infrastructure—farmer linkages, elevators, distribution channels, and grain processing activities—gives them an unparalleled opportunity to position themselves within the emerging identity-preserved grain sector before alternative systems have emerged. Yet, it is not clear to what degree cooperatives are cognizant of or prepared for these opportunities. The survey will reveal a baseline of cooperative resources and preferences that, at a minimum, could raise cooperative awareness of industry opportunities, and, ultimately, contribute to the standardized production and marketing grain sector desired by processors.

Because identity-preserved grains represent a new industry, data on production intentions, marketing, infrastructure requirements, and other facets of industry structure and performance are not available from alternative sources.

**Estimate of Burden:** Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 15 minutes per response.

**Respondents:** Local cooperatives involved in grain or feed marketing or handling.

**Estimated Number of Respondents:** 700.

**Estimated Number of Responses per Respondent:** One.

**Estimated Total Annual Burden on Respondents:** 175 hours.

Copies of this information collection can be obtained from Jean Mosley, Support Services Division, Regulation and Paperwork Management Branch, at (202) 690-0041.

#### Comments

Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the function of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the Agency's estimate of the burden of the proposed collection of information including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology. Comments may be sent to Jean Mosley, Support Services Division, Regulations and Paperwork Management Branch, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Stop 0742, Washington, D.C. 20250. All comments to this notice will be summarized. All comments will also become a matter of a public record.

Dated: April 28, 1999.

**Dayton J. Watkins,**

*Administrator, Rural Business-Cooperative Service.*

[FR Doc. 99-11979 Filed 5-11-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-XY-P

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Rural Utilities Service

#### Distance Learning and Telemedicine Loan and Grant Program

**AGENCY:** Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice of Application filing deadline.

**SUMMARY:** The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) announces its Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program application window for funding during fiscal year (FY) 1999. For FY 1999, \$12.5 million in grants and \$150 million in loans will be made available for distance learning and telemedicine projects serving rural America. The funding will be provided in three categories: (1) \$7.5 million will be available for grants; (2) \$100 million will be available for loans; and (3) \$55

million will be available for combination grants and loans (\$5 million in grants paired with \$50 million in loans).

**DATES:** Applications for grants must be postmarked by RUS no later than Friday, July 9, 1999. Applications for FY 1999 loans or combination loans and grants may be submitted at anytime up to September 30, 1999, and will be processed on a first-come, first-serve basis.

**ADDRESSES:** Applications are to be submitted to the Rural Utilities Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, STOP 1550, Washington, DC 20250-1550. Applications should be marked "Attention: Director, Advanced Services Division, Telecommunications Program".

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Roberta D. Purcell, Assistant Administrator, Telecommunications Program, Rural Utilities Service, STOP 1590, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-1590, Telephone (202) 720-9554, Facsimile (202) 720-0810.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** For FY 1999, \$7.5 million in grants, a combination of \$5 million in grants paired with \$50 million in loans, and \$100 million in loans will be made available for distance learning and telemedicine projects. On May 10, 1999, regulations published in the **Federal Register**, March 25, 1999, at 64 FR 14401, governing this program became final. These new regulations clarify the requirements for the different types of financial assistance offered; streamline policies and procedures for obtaining loans and expand the purposes for which loan funds can be used; and award grants on a competitive basis.

Notice is hereby given that under §§ 1703.124, 1703.133, and 1703.143, RUS has determined the maximum amount of an application for a grant that will be considered for funding in FY 1999 as \$350,000. The maximum amount for a loan, generally, that will be considered for funding in FY 1999 is \$10,000,000. However, RUS may fund a project greater than \$10,000,000 subject to the project's feasibility and the availability of loan funds.

Applications for financial assistance must be submitted in accordance with 7 CFR part 1703, which establishes the policies and procedures for submitting an application for financial assistance. This document and an application guide to assist in the preparation of applications are available on the